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THE GLASGOW SCHOOL: THE MEN AND THEIR WORK ♣ BY CHARLES M. KURTZ



THE present moment no group of artists is attracting more attention in this country and abroad than that known as "the Glasgow School." While of comparatively recent appearance, this school already is one of the strongest that has claimed recognition in modern times, and it seems destined to have tremendous influence. It is not based upon any affectation of the hour, in range of subject or technique; it involves no eccentricities and promulgates no new or startling doctrines. It introduces no innovations in perspective, and does not essay to portray Nature under essentially different garb, in fashion or coloring, than was established some time ago by the Creator. "Wherein, then," one may ask, "is the new school novel? Wherein does it differ from other schools?—or why should we recognize it as a school?" To answer these questions is, in part, the object of this paper.

Wherein the Glasgow School differs from other Schools of Expression

Decorative quality as an art-essential

Primarily, the Glasgow school is different from all other modern schools in its recognition of that fundamental essential in the greatest art—decorative quality—and in its masterly employment of color in the effort to secure this. Originally the art of painting was employed in decoration solely; later it lent itself to the pictorial representation of things and facts, and out of it grew the alphabet, history and literature. As it assumed new functions its decorative quality became depreciated. Occasionally artists appeared who brought back something of the fundamental spirit, but most of the painting was usurpation of the field belonging to the litterateur or that of the topographical map maker or both. The Glasgow men appear to realize that decorative quality is an essential, and also that there must be involved in art that is to live still further qualities: that it must suggest, must stimulate questionings of Nature, and verify the answers; that it must have in it resourcefulness to hold as well as to arouse the attention and interest; that it must involve a certain amount of mystery in either the representation itself or in the manner of the representation, in order that it may never become commonplace or tiresome. It must continually beckon, but never be completely overtaken and secured. It must have a sensitive, spiritual character, to live and to be loved. And all this it must owe to its creator—who must have within himself all that he can hope to involve in his art! These men know all this, and that knowledge animates their endeavor.

A school of Colorists

Almost every man identified with the Glasgow group seems to have been born a colorist—a colorist at once of strength and refinement.

And colorists are not numerous in this world. By much painstaking and long practice almost anyone can become a tolerable draughtsman, but the true colorist is a good deal like the true poet—he is not the result of any mere educational system. In richness and intensity, in purity and beauty, often in extreme brilliance, and always in exquisite harmony of coloring, the Glasgow pictures will stand forth in any collection wherein they may be included. In their subtle use of color these men often remind one of the Japanese—of Kiyonaga, Toyohiro, Utamaro and Hokûsai. The Glasgow school often has been accused of Japanese parentage on one side of the house and descent from the painters of the Barbizon school on the other. This certainly would be anything but ignoble artistic ancestry.

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A recent writer in Blackwood's Magazine thus says of the school: "The influences which have called it into being are complex, but the most powerful, undoubtedly, are Whistler's exquisite art (which blends so subtly the great traditions of the past and the wonderful decorative arts of the Far East), and the training several of the Glasgow men received in Paris, though, from the pictures alone, it is impossible to say who these have been. Desire for form as the basis of art, appreciation of the value of true tone and of the charm of decorative effect, increased regard for unity of effect—these are directions in which the new impulses have made themselves felt, and they are such as make for the purely artistic motive and the pictorial expression of thought. The talent of these men is incontestable; they possess great technical power and fine feeling for beauty and character."

A Foreign Comment

I think it matters little whence inspiration or good influence comes. If the influence is digested and properly assimilated, that is enough. It is the undigested influence that is fatal. If the Glasgow men have derived somewhat from Japan or Barbizon or Whistler, what they give us is not of any of these but Scotch, and moreover is the "individual own" of the particular painter who makes the presentment.

Concerning "influence"

The painters of the Glasgow school are not colorists alone; they are strong in drawing, in composition—composition in lines and masses as well as in color—and they are remarkable in their right expression of values. Most of them appear to work with equal facility in oil, water-color or pastel—as mood or subject may suggest. They are discriminating also in choice of subjects as well as in their treatment of them.

These men not only appear to be gifted highly by nature for the profession they have chosen, but their work shows they have had excellent training—training of the eye and the hand, and—beyond that, training of the mind. There is much more in their work than is accounted for by mere keenness of observation and facility of technique;—there is thought and feeling,—and herein is a basis of their strength. These remarks apply in greater or less degree to all the

The Training of the Glasgow men

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Evolution of the
Glasgow School

The Rise of Glasgow

Art Patronage in
Glasgow

men who constitute this remarkable group of artists, and therein they are closely related, though each painter is an individual of very distinctive characteristics, as may be observed in his every expression.

The Glasgow school has grown out of certain conditions in Scotland—especially the West of Scotland—which lately have brought forth fruit not only in art, but in literature, science and general cultivation. It has seemed very strange to me that many writers have expressed surprise that a commercial town like Glasgow—a city of smoke and grime, material of the material, should give us art of the most splendid color and the most poetic feeling, and literature of the most exquisitely tender and beautiful sentiment. Why should there be such an awakening from such a quarter? To me it does not seem at all strange. In a certain sense it is exactly such a “reaction” as reasonably might be looked for. I note the same conditions as existed in Glasgow in our own Chicago, St. Louis, Pittsburg and other American cities which may be likened to Glasgow in a material way. Wherever there is great prosperity established upon a firm foundation—not speculative, but real and stable—there is bound to come, sooner or later, an intellectual flowering, and this will be strong and vigorous exactly in proportion to the strength and vigor of the soil from which it springs.

Glasgow within the past hundred years has advanced from a slumberous country town on the banks of a salmon stream to one of the greatest seaports in the world, and one of the most prosperous manufacturing centers—with a population of nearly a million. Enormous fortunes have been accumulated there from the development of the natural and acquired advantages of the place. Glasgow, unlike Edinburgh, was not a city of traditions, its people were not slaves to any form of fashion. It had not been demoralized by the splendors of a court, nor had it fallen into the enervating ways of a city of social ambitions. It was simply a tremendously serious, busy Scotch town.

As prosperity increased some of the men of great wealth began to look beyond mere accumulation. They began to travel and to enjoy life. Being Scotch, and consequently serious and philosophic, they turned to the consideration of the real value of wealth. It did not take them long to discover that one of its greatest values was the power it gave them to improve themselves, to cultivate their power to enjoy the best things of life. They patronized the fine arts, fostered literature, encouraged educational work, and spent money liberally for beautifying their city as well as their homes. The wealthy citizens of Glasgow became enlightened collectors of paintings—among the most enlightened in the whole world. Not being hampered by academic traditions they bought that which most strongly appealed to them for its truthfulness—in sentiment—to Nature. The Scotchmen bought the works of the great French painters of 1830 before the French people had recognized their merit, and even before Americans began to buy

them. Perhaps nowhere are there more really fine examples of the work of Rousseau, Corot, Millet, Daubigny, Dupré, Diaz, Courbet, Fromentin, Troyon and the other great men of that school than can be found in the splendid private collections of Glasgow. The modern Dutch school likewise was recognized by Glasgow collectors, and Israels, Artz, Mauve, Mesdag, Bosboom, Mathew and James Maris and the other strong Dutch painters also are represented in those collections. And all these pictures—pictures by men in love with their work, who put enjoyment into it so that those who studied it and became en rapport with it might derive enjoyment from it—were lent freely to the local exhibitions and had tremendous influence upon the art appreciation of the city.

The Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, under the guidance of some of these intelligent and wealthy art collectors, was another factor in the development of art interest in Glasgow—and also in that of the Glasgow school. Here many of the ablest painters of Great Britain, France, Holland and Germany were invited to send pictures, and here, each year, was held one of the best exhibitions of contemporary art in Europe—averaging far higher in the meritorious character of the work exhibited than any Salon or Royal Academy. And here the young men of the coming Glasgow school were encouraged to show their pictures, and in this exhibition they were able to compare their work with that of the great artists of their time, to discover wherein their own productions were immature, to study how to overcome their deficiencies, and to note wherein they might feel encouraged.

Scotland is a country of color. In the springtime the greens are of the most tender hues, and the skies are either clear blue or opalescent. There are fogs sometimes, and cloud effects not unlike those of Holland, but there are not quite such frequent changes of weather as one finds in Holland. In midsummer the greens are rich and strong, and flowers are frequent and are splendid in color. The fall covers the moors with purple heather of wonderful richness, and this later changes to a brown—a full deep brown which goes well with frost and snow and winter skies. The Scotch people always have been wedded to color. The great clans were known by the varying color combinations of their plaids—and it would be difficult to find more effective combinations than are many of these.

The young men who came to constitute the Glasgow school were men of keenly sympathetic nature. Their work shows this. Undoubtedly they drew much from the painters of the Barbizon school, but they never imitated them—any more than, after some of the Glasgow men had studied in Paris, they returned to Scotland to paint like Frenchmen. They recognized the spirituality of the Barbizon painters, but when the Scotchmen painted, they painted not the forest of Fontainebleau or the plain of Chailly, but the forests and hills—the high-

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An intelligently directed
Art Society

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lands and lowlands of Scotland—the Scotland they knew so thoroughly and loved so well. And inasmuch as they painted it with sincerity and feeling, with its beauty in their eyes and its poetry in their souls, in so far has their work suggestive resemblance to that of the painters of Barbizon, who painted the country and the people they knew and loved. But Nature's garb in Scotland is very different in fashion and color from the costume she wears in France.

The Painters of the
Glasgow School

The Glasgow school does not comprise a large number of painters; originally there were only twelve men associated in the movement. They were: Joseph Crawhall, Jr., David Gauld, James Guthrie, George Henry, Edward A. Hornel, John Lavery, W. Y. MacGregor, Arthur Melville, James Paterson, Alexander Roche, R. Macaulay Stevenson and E. A. Walton. A little later T. Millie Dow and William Kennedy were added to the group, and D. Y. Cameron also became identified with it. Other men, working in sympathy, subsequently were included: Stuart Park, George Pirie, T. Corson Morton, J. Whitelaw Hamilton, Grosvenor Thomas, J. Reid Murray, W. H. P. Nicholson, J. E. Christie and Harrington Mann. For a time the group had a formal organization and held meetings, but all that has been done away with, and the only present relationship of the men of the Glasgow school is that of common sympathy based upon love of Nature and Art.

The Debut of the
Glasgow School

The Glasgow school, as such, made its début at the last exhibition held at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, in the spring of 1890. Prior to that time the works of a few of the men had been exhibited, intermittently, at the Salon and the Royal Academy, and had not failed to produce a certain impression. Lavery's "Lawn Tennis," exhibited in Paris in 1888, attracted special attention to the Glasgow artists. For it the painter was awarded the first gold medal that ever went from Paris to Scotland for a work of art! The managers of the Grosvenor Gallery, ever on the alert to discover and present to the world works of the latest and most advanced tendencies, selected for the principal portion of their 1890 exhibit, paintings by those men of Glasgow whose works appealed to them as being particularly strong and individual. When the exhibition was opened it created a sensation. It was generally recognized that a new school of artistic expression had made its way into the light, and the critics were very active for a time. Some condemned it because it was contrary to the traditions of the alleged art of Great Britain; others found fault with it because they did not understand it. To others, perhaps, it really may have appeared to be insufficient, but in the eyes of a few it was a new art evangel. The exhibition, at any rate, created vigorous discussion, and "the Glasgow School" came to be accepted as a fact in art.

During the exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery Adolph Paulus and Walter Firle, charged with a commission from the Munich Society of Artists to visit the various exhibitions in Europe in the interest of the

forthcoming International Art Exhibition to be held in Munich, visited London, where, among all the exhibitions of the year, that at the Grosvenor interested them most. As a result they went on to Glasgow, where visits to the studios of the artists confirmed and enhanced the impressions they had gained from the exhibition in London. They invited all these artists to send works to the Munich exhibition. The artists complied, and the authorities of the exhibition hung the works of the painters of "the Glasgow School" in a gallery by themselves, with the result of creating a profound impression. This was the first thoroughly comprehensive and representative collection of these works that yet had been shown.

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Munich, where art is almost the supreme interest, recognized at once the greatness of the new school. The art critics praised the pictures and the people bought them. "The Glasgow School" was one of the great successes of the exhibition, and the reputation of the painters was established in Southern Germany. Ever since that year the Glasgow men have contributed to the Munich exhibitions (during the past three years to the "Secession" exhibitions) and always have received appreciative and liberal patronage. Indeed at these exhibitions their work has been seen to better advantage than anywhere else in Europe—not excepting Scotland—though the men usually are very fairly represented at the exhibitions of the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts—but here their pictures are not hung together, by themselves, as at Munich.

The Glasgow School
in Germany

The Glasgow school made its first appearance in America this year, at the St. Louis Exposition. One hundred and eighteen pictures were shown, and all the men associated with the movement—with three exceptions—were represented characteristically and comprehensively. The exhibition aroused more interest and created more discussion than any other art exhibition ever held in St. Louis, and that the works were appreciated was fairly evidenced by the fact that out of one hundred and nine pictures which were for sale (the others were borrowed from private collections in Glasgow) nineteen found purchasers;—this in a city where, three months before, none of the work of the Glasgow men ever had been seen, and where the names of the painters and the character of the school were almost utterly unknown! From St. Louis the Glasgow pictures went to Chicago, where they are now being shown at the Art Institute. From there they go to Cincinnati, and later come to the East.

The Glasgow pictures
in America

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